

AN OFFICE RUN ON PATRONAGE



Politicians and their relatives fill dozens of well-paying jobs thanks to the county recorder

JOSEPH L. WAGNER
PLAIN DEALER REPORTER

Even if you have never been to the Cuyahoga County recorder's office, you will no doubt be familiar with the names of the workers behind the counters.

That's because some have appeared on your election ballots for mayor and City Council. With others, their spouses or relatives have sent you campaign fliers for congressional races, judge-ships or school board seats.

Recorder Patrick O'Malley's staff directory, you might say, is a Who's Who of the politically connected, with surnames of Mottl, Russo and Sustarsic.

A Plain Dealer review of the recorder's 2007 payroll found that O'Malley has given nearly three dozen patronage jobs, with combined salaries of \$1.4 million, to politicians and their kin — former mayors, the son and daughter of a judge, the wife of a councilman.

A review of applications also found people whose previous job skills don't match the work they do for O'Malley.

A \$16,000-a-year teaching assistant became a \$46,000-a-year department head.

A \$10-an-hour construction worker is now a \$40,000-a-year clerk.

O'Malley declined to talk at length about his hiring practices, but he acknowledged that he has a well-connected payroll: "What am I going to do, pretend it doesn't exist?"

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A deal for a job?

After filing to run for Cuyahoga County recorder, Cathy Luks says incumbent Patrick O'Malley offered her a job in his office if she would drop out of the race. Details, A13

Prosecuting patronage

A federal court has ruled that discriminating against job candidates on the basis of politics is as serious as excluding them for race, religion, gender and physical ability. Details, A13

Who are these people?


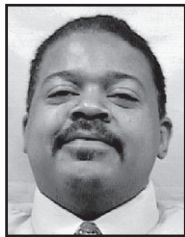








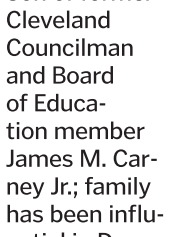

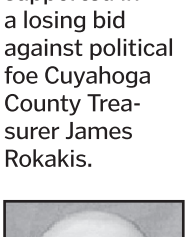
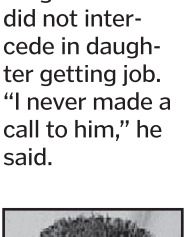





They are among the politically connected folks who have spent time on the payroll of Cuyahoga County Recorder Patrick O'Malley. For more background on them, go to Page A12




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Editor's note:

This is the first story in an occasional series examining government payrolls and hiring practices in Northeast Ohio.

\$29,999 and under					\$30,000 to \$49,999				
									
James M. Carney III Clerk Hired: 2006 Resigned: 2007 Salary: \$13,196, part time Most recent previous job: Worked for Charisma Vending, Westlake Connection: Son of former Cleveland Councilman and Board of Education member James M. Carney Jr.; family has been influential in Democratic politics.	Steve Linton Clerk Hired: 2000 Resigned: 2007 to become bailiff in East Cleveland Municipal Court Salary: \$7,090, part time Most recent previous job: Driver Connection: Democratic precinct committee person.	Charles R. Flanagan Clerk Hired: 2004 Resigned: 2007 to join Cuyahoga County prosecutor's office Salary: \$18,100 Most recent previous job: Laborer Connection: Father is Dan Flanagan, whom O'Malley supported in a losing bid against political foe Cuyahoga County Treasurer James Rokakis.	Christina Russo Clerk Hired: 2006 Salary: \$25,000 Most recent previous job: Greeting card counter sales Connection: Daughter of Cuyahoga County Juvenile Court Judge Joseph F. Russo. Comment: Judge said he did not intercede in daughter getting job. "I never made a call to him," he said.	Tonya Dixon Clerk Hired: 1998 Salary: \$29,705 Most recent previous job: Assistant with Convention and Visitors Bureau of Greater Cleveland Connection: Application listed former Rep. Louis Stokes as a relative.	Angelina Stach Clerk Hired: 2000 Salary: \$30,899 Most recent previous job: Executive assistant, Cleveland City Council. Connection: Worked for Cleveland Councilman Joe Cimperman and was his campaign manager in 1997 and 1998. Comment: Cimperman referred her to O'Malley. "He knew her dad from Old Brooklyn," Cimperman said.	Sheila Sanders Clerk Hired: 2003 Salary: \$32,000 Most recent previous job: TSA screener, Cleveland Hopkins International Airport Connection: North Randall City Council member.	Rita Russell Clerk Hired: 1998 Salary: \$32,887 Most recent previous job: Cuyahoga County Clerk of Courts office Connection: Former president of Brooklyn Board of Education.	Nelson Cintron Clerk Hired: 1997 Resigned: 1998 Rehired: 2006 Left: 2006 Salary: \$35,000 Most recent previous job: Corrections officer, Cuyahoga County Sheriff's Office. Connection: Cleveland City Council member.	Kenneth Dowell Clerk Hired: 2006 Resigned: July 2007 to join Ohio Lottery Commission Rehired: August 2007 Salary: \$39,999, part time Most recent previous job: Loan officer, Summit Mortgage Co. Connection: A founder and officer of Blacks United in Local Democracy, a political action committee; sergeant-at-arms for Cuyahoga County Democratic Party.
									
Angela Yuko Clerk Hired: 2002 Salary: \$6,951, part time Most recent previous job: Pizza shop server Connection: Father is State Rep. Kenny Yuko.	Anthony Sustarsic Clerk Hired: 2004 Resigned: 2007 to join Cuyahoga County prosecutor's office Salary: \$21,500 Most recent previous job: Laborer, city of Euclid Connection: Euclid Democratic precinct committee person; former member of Euclid City Council; father is Jerry Sustarsic, former president of Euclid City Council; reference was Euclid Mayor Bill Cervenik.	Joseph Russo Clerk Hired: 2004 Resigned: 2004 Salary: \$25,000 Most recent previous job: Part time in data processing, Cuyahoga County treasurer's office. Connection: Son of Cuyahoga County Juvenile Court Judge Joseph F. Russo. Comment: Judge said he did not talk to O'Malley about getting son the job.	Clarice Hodge Clerk Hired: 2005 Salary: \$25,749 Most recent previous job: Customer service representative, Lifeline Connection: Sister is Jennifer Lastery, O'Malley's personnel director.	Katherine Wagner Clerk Hired: 1997 Salary: \$31,250 Most recent previous job: Educational aide, Garfield Heights schools Connection: Husband is president of Garfield Heights City Council.	Richard Kreuzer Clerk Hired: 1998 Retired: 2007 Salary: \$31,228 Most recent previous job: Supervisor, plastics manufacturing company Connection: Parma Democratic precinct committee person; wife is former State Rep. June April Kreuzer; job reference was former State Rep. Barbara Pringle. Comment: He said politics had nothing to do with getting the job.	Sean Roche Clerk Hired: 1999 Salary: \$34,999 Most recent previous job: Assisted officers and dispatchers at the Cuyahoga County Data Center Connection: Uncle is O'Malley chief of staff, though Sean Roche started before his uncle; listed three other relatives working for Cuyahoga County and Cleveland Municipal Court on application.	Sharon Hawthorne Clerk Hired: 1997 Salary: \$38,021 Most recent previous job: Substitute teacher, Cleveland schools Connection: Euclid Democratic precinct person; ran several times for Euclid City Council; her reference was former Rep. Louis Stokes.	Michael Ciaravino Document security administrator Hired: 2007 Salary: \$41,600, part time Most recent previous job: Maple Heights mayor Connection: Was also city prosecutor and a Democratic precinct committee person.	
The Plain Dealer attempted to contact each person pictured here for comment. Recorder Patrick O'Malley refused to allow employee contacts by phone during county business hours. Any employee not reached was sent a letter saying a photo and job history might be used with this story.									

“There were names Pat gave me, and he just said, ‘This is who we’re hiring.’ He didn’t want me questioning him.”

Mark Sullivan, who served as O'Malley's personnel director for six years

O'MALLEY

FROM A1
An office run on patronage

He also said that just because some employees are politically connected, their jobs aren't guaranteed. The recorder said he fired Roy Jech, a Parma councilman, from an office manager position because he said Jech's performance was unsatisfactory.

Jech said he was fired over a dispute with O'Malley about a candidate endorsement.

One of O'Malley's former personnel chiefs said the recorder personally handled hiring. Full-time jobs were seldom posted, said Mark Sullivan, who served as personnel director for six years, and O'Malley supplied the candidates.

Sullivan said he rarely interviewed applicants.

"There were names Pat gave me, and he just said, 'This is who we're hiring,'" Sullivan recalled. "He didn't want me questioning him."

But Sullivan said he did question O'Malley about two disbarred lawyers on the payroll.

William Lavin, a \$75,000-a-year assistant supervisor, served prison time for bank fraud a decade ago after being accused of stealing money from clients. Paula Harris, a \$37,131-a-year clerk, was accused in 1995 of participating in a telemarketing scam that targeted the

elderly. She pleaded guilty to conspiracy to defraud the federal government.

O'Malley's explanation: "He believed in giving people second chances," Sullivan said.

Lavin and Harris could not be reached for comment. O'Malley would not let them take calls at the office.

Sullivan resigned last summer to take a personnel job with the Ohio Lottery Commission, where the hiring practices are far different. Sullivan said job openings are posted with minimum qualifications, and he participates in extensive interviews with applicants.

Critics such as county GOP Chairman Rob Frost contend that O'Malley runs the recorder's office as a patronage machine for the Democratic Party and himself, dispensing jobs as a way of building an influential political network.

Frost said patronage drives up the cost of government by padding the payroll with unqualified and unnecessary workers.

"We're losing our county population, and our county budget just keeps growing," he said.

The handing out of jobs for political or personal reasons is legal in Ohio. But patronage is under attack by federal prosecutors in Chicago and has been scorned by government reformers dating to Tammany Hall in New York.

One of the reasons the practice survives is that it allows elected officials to easily expand their political bases.

"Patronage workers give a candidate a long reach into a community," said Henry Eckhart, spokesman for govern-

ment watchdog Common Cause-Ohio.

But Eckhart said taxpayers should not "underwrite the cost of a campaign organization."

Some people think that patronage fosters effective government because the people who are hired want to make the boss look good, said John Green, political-science professor at the University of Akron.

And that patronage exists in Cuyahoga County, a longtime Democratic stronghold, should come as no surprise. Green said the practice is most often found in areas where one political party has dominated.

At the recorder's office, O'Malley took over in 1997, when fellow Democrat Frank Russo became county auditor. Over the next 11 years, O'Malley rid the office of all but 12 of Russo's hires and expanded the payroll by about a dozen employees.

Some of those people got their jobs through unorthodox channels.

Frederick Fleming filled O'Malley's gas tank one day and was hired on the spot as a \$12-an-hour clerk. Olympic boxing hopeful Raynell Williams told O'Malley, a former wrestler, that he needed cash while training. Williams is now on leave from his \$25,000-a-year clerk's job.

By O'Malley's count, his office now employs 103 workers. That's nearly twice as many employees as in the recorder's office in Franklin County, which has slightly fewer people than Cuyahoga County.

Taking some credit for a dozen of

those hires is Kevin Conwell. The Democratic Cleveland city councilman said he forwarded 12 job candidates to O'Malley and the recorder hired them all.

"He's been good to our community, more than anybody in that county building," Conwell said.

But the councilman said he had nothing to do with one other O'Malley hire: Conwell's wife, Yvonne. She was hired as a \$41,000-a-year clerk in 2004, two years after her husband took his council seat. Her previous job was as an \$11.69-an-hour case manager for a mental-health agency. She is now a \$51,500-a-year communications director for the recorder.

Not all of O'Malley's hires have worked out as well.

The recorder fired former Cleveland City Councilman Nelson Cintron in May 2006. Cintron said the firing came after he launched an unsuccessful campaign for state representative.

Earlier this year, Cintron tried to unseat O'Malley in the Democratic primary. Cintron lost and accused O'Malley of using a "small army" of employees to campaign against him.

O'Malley said the workers campaigned on their own time.

Plain Dealer computer-assisted reporting editor Rich Exner and news researcher Tonya Sams contributed to this story.

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O'Malley started out as councilman

Cuyahoga County Recorder Patrick J. O'Malley has been on the political scene since 1990, when he began the first of two terms representing Cleveland's West Side Ward 16 on City Council.

But the 49-year-old Brooklyn native made what is perhaps his most important political connection a decade earlier at Kent State University, where the political-science major roomed with future Cuyahoga County Prosecutor Bill Mason. After both men completed law school, and Mason became law director in Parma, they helped found an upstart political-action group called Democrats 2000, or D2K, to expand the party.

And O'Malley quickly benefited. D2K helped persuade precinct members to appoint O'Malley as recorder in 1997, after fellow Democrat Frank Russo became auditor.
















In 2002, O'Malley was the D2K candidate to fill a vacant county commissioner's seat. He lost to Peter Lawson Jones, who had the support of Democratic regulars.

Despite considerable marital and financial problems that gave him a high media profile, O'Malley was able to win re-election as recorder in 2004 by a wide margin.

This November, he will seek another four-year term to the \$74,422-a-year post. He faces a challenge from Republican Cathy Luks.

He has held several state and county political party posts. Currently, he is secretary of the Ohio Democratic Party.

Politics can make a difference when you are looking for a county job. Here are some current and former employees of Cuyahoga County Recorder Patrick O’Malley and the ties that may have helped them land their positions.

\$50,000 and above									
 <p>Susan Berichon Clerk Hired: 2001 Salary: \$40,011 Most recent previous job: Bailiff, Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court Connection: Husband, John, was Fairview Park ward leader and bailiff for Juvenile Court Judge Joseph F. Russo. Comments: "You would have to ask Mr. O'Malley why he hired me."</p>	 <p>Danny Colonna Director of special projects Hired: 2002 Resigned: 2007 to join Cuyahoga County auditor's office Salary: \$43,000 Most recent previous job: Territory manager, Unique Marketers Connection: Brook Park City Council member; wife, Danielle, is deputy clerk of Berea Municipal Court; father, Rocco Colonna, is former member of the Ohio House and former member of the Ohio Liquor Commission. Comment: "I was looking for a position to get more involved in government work. Fortunately, Pat gave me the opportunity."</p>	 <p>Robert E. Sweeney Clerk Hired: 2004 Resigned: 2008 to attend college Salary: \$43,000 Most recent previous job: Cook, Pizza Inn Connection: Grandson of Robert E. Sweeney, the late lawyer, congressman and Cuyahoga County commissioner; O'Malley worked in the Sweeney law firm before entering public life.</p>	 <p>Kathleen Marshall Administrative assistant Hired: 2003 Resigned: 2007 to join Ohio Lottery Commission Salary: \$47,000 Most recent previous job: Case examiner, gerontology department, Case Western Reserve University Connection: Married to G. Timothy Marshall, an O'Malley lawyer during the 1994 domestic violence case; is Democratic precinct committee person in Olmsted Township; was campaign treasurer for O'Malley. Comment: She said she got the recorder's office job before her husband represented O'Malley, and prior to the township party position and being O'Malley's campaign treasurer.</p>	 <p>Yvonne Conwell Director of communications Hired: 2004 Salary: \$51,500 Most recent previous job: Case manager, Bridgeway Inc. Connection: Democratic precinct committee person; wife of Cleveland Councilman Kevin Conwell.</p>	 <p>William Newsome Jr. Labor relations adviser Hired: 2004 Resigned: 2007 to join Ohio Lottery Commission Salary: \$54,000 Most recent previous job: Unknown Connection: Glenville ward leader; Democratic precinct committee person Comment: He said there was no connection between ward leader support for O'Malley and securing his job. He said he brought skills from organized labor to the position.</p>	 <p>Brian Day Supervisor of record management Hired: 1999 Salary: \$55,000 Resigned: 2007 to join Cuyahoga County auditor's office Most recent previous job: Manager of photocopy retrieval section, National City Bank Connection: Parma City Council member; married to Colleen Corrigan Day, executive director of Cuyahoga County Democratic Party; brother of Tom Day Jr., Bedford Municipal Court clerk. Comment: "Politics, no. We do a very good job working on our projects in the recorder's office."</p>	 <p>William Lavin Assistant supervisor Hired: 1998 Salary: \$75,000 Most recent previous job: Mediator Connection: Disbarred as lawyer following 1997 conviction for stealing \$200,000 from clients; served 15 months in federal prison; future State Rep. Kenny Yuko referred Lavin, his neighbor, to O'Malley; Yuko, at the time, was with Laborers Local 860, which supported O'Malley politically.</p>	 <p>James Zak Computer analyst Hired: 2000 Salary: \$84,999 Most recent previous job: Residential interior designer Connection: Father-in-law is Chuck Sebes, former leader of the Parma Democratic Party whose precinct delegates voted overwhelmingly to select O'Malley as recorder in 1997; Sebes' brother, Joe, is leader of the Parma Heights Democratic Party Comment: Chuck Sebes said he pushed for O'Malley's appointment as recorder but "there was nothing to obligate him to me"; instructed his son-in-law to apply, "but, whatever you do, do not use my name," Sebes said.</p>	 <p>Thomas Roche Chief of staff Hired: 2001 Salary: \$115,000 Most recent previous job: Lawyer/administrator Robert E. Sweeney & Co. law firm Connection: Met while he and O'Malley were at the Sweeney firm; once was O'Malley's personal lawyer; wife, Maureen, is bailiff to Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Judge Nancy McDonnell.</p>
 <p>Saratha Goggins Clerk Hired: 1998 Resigned: 2004 to become mayor of East Cleveland Salary: \$43,000 Most recent previous job: Worked in a hospital radiology department Connection: East Cleveland City Council member. Comment: "I didn't know anyone. I just walked in and applied."</p>	 <p>Anne T. Collins Clerk/secretary to O'Malley Hired: 2005 Salary: \$45,999 Most recent previous job: Legal secretary Connection: O'Malley campaign treasurer.</p>	 <p>Genevieve Mitchell Department head Hired: 2000 Salary: \$45,999 Most recent previous job: Teaching assistant, Life Skills Connection: Former Cleveland school board member; past president of the Carl Stokes Brigade; Bert Jennings, the group's recording secretary, said he and Mitchell are co-producers of the Carl Stokes Forum, a local-access cable talk show featuring political leaders, including O'Malley.</p>	 <p>Ronald Mottl Jr. Public outreach representative Hired: 2006 Salary: \$53,044 Most recent previous job: Worked in Cuyahoga County auditor's office Connection: Was Parma auditor and City Council member; father is a former congressman. Comment: "I'm very grateful that he hired Ron," said his father, Ron Mottl, who has donated \$1,500 the past three years to the O'Malley campaign.</p>	 <p>Mary Walsh DeJesus Administrative assistant Hired: 1997 Salary: \$60,000 Most recent previous job: Civil service examiner, Cleveland Connection: Olmsted Township Democratic precinct committee person.</p>	 <p>Roy Jech Director of operations Hired: 1998 Left: 1999 Salary: \$59,000 Most recent previous job: Pipefitter Connection: Parma City Council member, who said he helped O'Malley win precinct support for his position in 1997.</p>	 <p>James McNea Department head Hired: 1997 Salary: \$75,000 Most recent previous job: Part-time, show-display supervisor at the International Exposition Center Connection: Son of William J. McNea, former president of the Cleveland Police Patrolmen's Association.</p>			



EUSTACIO HUMPHREY | PLAIN DEALER FILE PHOTOGRAPH

Former North Royalton Mayor Cathy Luks says that County Recorder Patrick O’Malley offered her a job in his office if she would drop out of this year’s recorder’s race. Luks, a Republican, said she refused, and will take on O’Malley, a Democrat, in the November election.

O’Malley denies offering job to ex-mayor

JOSEPH L. WAGNER
Plain Dealer Reporter

Shortly after filing in January to run for Cuyahoga County recorder, Cathy Luks said incumbent Patrick O’Malley offered her a \$50,000-a-year job in his office if she dropped out of the race.

Luks, a former North Royalton mayor, said O’Malley invited her to lunch at Shula’s, a popular political hangout in Independence, and pitched the deal midway through their 75-minute meeting.

“If you decide to work for me . . . if you drop out of the race, you’ve got to do it by Tuesday,” O’Malley can be heard saying on an often inaudible tape that Luks said she made with a recorder hidden in her pocket.

O’Malley declined to talk about the recording, but he denied offering Luks a community-outreach position to get her out of the race. The recorder recalled that his lunchtime conversation with Luks focused on how to keep a mutual friend out of the middle of their race.

Under Ohio law, offering something of value to affect an election is a felony. A conviction could result in a candidate being forced off the ballot or being barred from taking office.

Henry Eckhart, spokesman for the government watchdog group Common Cause-Ohio, said an incumbent offering a job to get rid of a challenger would be a “dumb thing to do.”

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Federal court in Chicago getting tough on patronage

JOSEPH L. WAGNER
Plain Dealer Reporter

A federal court is pushing landmark patronage reform in, of all places, politically notorious Cook County, Ill.

The court upheld the convictions of four of Chicago Mayor Richard Daley’s top lieutenants, and Daley’s reputed patronage chief was scheduled to report to prison this week to begin a four-year term for violating a court order barring the awarding of jobs on the basis of politics.

“Nowhere else is there such wide-scale prosecution of patronage offenses,” Jay Stewart, executive director of the Chicago Better Government Association, told The Plain Dealer.

A federal court ruled that discriminating against job candidates on the basis of politics is as serious as excluding them for race, religion, gender and physical ability, Stewart said.

The court is enforcing an order handed down decades ago after lawyer Michael Shakman sued Cook County’s Democratic organization. Shakman complained that he was defeated at the polls for a state party post by legions of political operatives who held jobs doled out by the current mayor’s father, Richard Daley.

The ruling led to a series of orders from 1972 to 2005 demanding an end to patronage.

In 2005, the court appointed a master to monitor hiring and ordered Chicago to establish a \$12 million fund to compensate people damaged by the system.

Last week, the Chicago Tribune listed 1,427 people who will share the pot. One person getting money is a tree trimmer who claimed he was passed



M. SPENCER GREEN | ASSOCIATED PRESS

Former Chicago patronage chief Robert Sorich, right, reported to prison last Monday to serve a nearly four-year sentence. He was convicted in July 2006, when this photo was taken, of awarding jobs and promotions to Mayor Richard Daley campaign workers.

over 13 times for promotions. He is to net \$100,000.

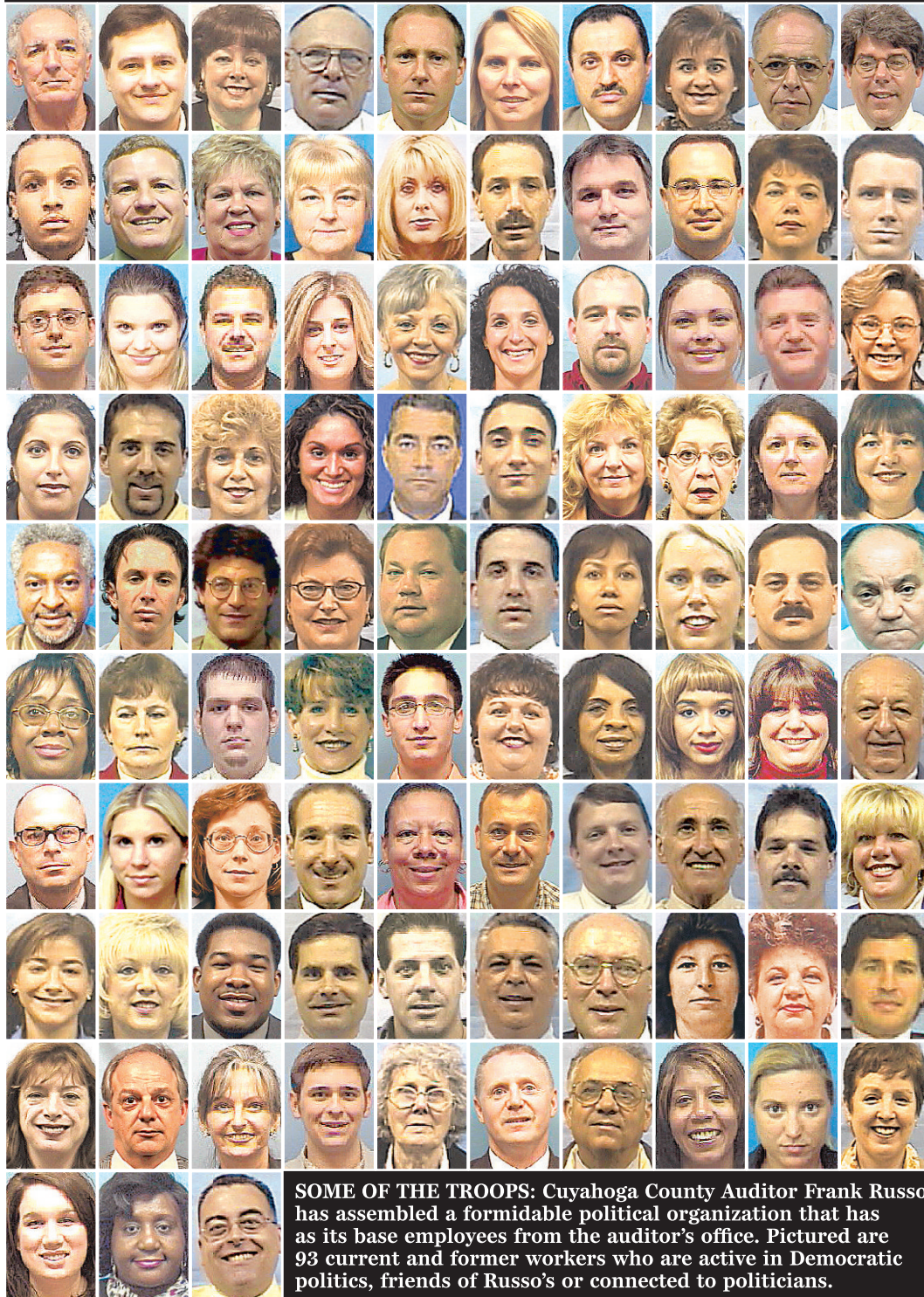
Stewart wants other prosecutors to take similar paths.

“It’s a blueprint for a U.S. attorney to look at,” he said.

To reach this Plain Dealer reporter: jwagner@plaind.com, 216-999-4906

PLAIN DEALER EXCLUSIVE | PAYROLLS AND POLITICS

A POLITICAL MACHINE, FINANCED BY YOU



SOME OF THE TROOPS: Cuyahoga County Auditor Frank Russo has assembled a formidable political organization that has as its base employees from the auditor's office. Pictured are 93 current and former workers who are active in Democratic politics, friends of Russo's or connected to politicians.

A review of Cuyahoga County Auditor **Frank Russo's** 2007 payroll finds scores of employees with political rank or connections to other politicians

JOSEPH L. WAGNER
Plain Dealer Reporter

Officially, the Cuyahoga County auditor appraises property and sets tax rates. Unofficially, Frank Russo supplies the muscle for a mighty Democratic machine.

By some accounts, Russo is the most influential party leader in overwhelmingly Democratic Cuyahoga County. By nearly all accounts, the source of that influence is his vast network of politically connected friends.

Those friends include mayors and council members, ward leaders and precinct committee members — the kinds of people who make and break candidates.

A Plain Dealer review of the auditor's 2007 payroll found that 93 of the 283 employees held political rank, had connections to other political leaders or had a long association with Russo.

The salaries of those 93 workers totaled \$4.5 million last year.

The newspaper found that the auditor's staffers were politically active in more than a third of the county's 59 communities.

SEE PAYROLLS | A17

Inside

Patronage

A look at 49 of Frank Russo's workers, who some say could be purely political hires. **A16**

Connected

Auditor employees with political connections. **A17**

A family tradition

Politics was all around Frank Russo as he was growing up. **A18**

Who gets hired?

The auditor says the deciding factor is devotion to public service. **A18**



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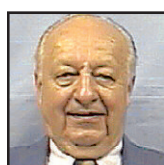
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Editor's note:

This is the second story in an occasional series examining government payrolls and hiring practices in Northeast Ohio.

The public need not apply

These 49 people — on the 2007 payroll of Cuyahoga County Auditor Frank Russo — are friends of Russo's or are linked to political allies or other politicians. They collectively earned more than \$2 million last year.



Ted Sliwa
Public outreach
Hired: 1998
Salary: \$18/hour
Highest degree reported: Bachelor of arts
Most recent previous job: County recorder's office.
Connection: Cleveland City Council member, 1968-78.



Hannah Gaul
Office assistant
Hired: 2007
Salary: \$6,240, part time
Highest degree reported: High school diploma
Most recent previous job: Office manager
Connection: Granddaughter of former County Treasurer Frank Gaul; daughter of Common Pleas Judge Daniel Gaul.



Kristine George
Administrative assistant
Hired: 1998
Salary: \$14,133, part time
Highest degree reported: High school diploma
Most recent previous job: In recorder's office
Connection: Wife of prominent businessman and political donor Tony George.
Comment: "I hired Kristine for Kristine," Russo said.



Amy Furukawa
Administrative assistant
Hired: 2002
Salary: \$22,409, part time
Highest degree reported: Bachelor of arts, political science
Most recent previous job: Public information, recorder's office
Connection: Listed County Treasurer James Rokakis and political advertising specialist Bill Burges as references.
Comment: Furukawa said she is a college graduate and had internships in Washington, D.C., before landing a county job.



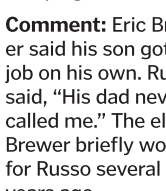
James A. Dornback
Office assistant
Hired: 2003
Salary: \$23,333, part time
Highest degree reported: High school equivalency diploma
Most recent previous job: Service technician
Connection: Russo said he met him while Dornback was installing Russo's home swimming pool. After a chance meeting later, Dornback applied for a job.



Brian O'Malley
Office assistant
Hired: 2003
Resigned: 2008
Salary: \$24,369
Highest degree reported: High school diploma
Most recent previous job: Heavy equipment operator
Connection: Son of former County Recorder Patrick O'Malley.
Comment: Russo said O'Malley resigned May 30 to join the military.



Chase Brewer
Office assistant
Hired: 2006
Resigned: 2008
Salary: \$26,244
Highest degree reported: High school diploma
Most recent previous job: Customer service coordinator
Connection: Son of East Cleveland Mayor Eric Brewer; listed on resume that he worked on East Cleveland mayoral campaigns for his dad and Emmanuel Onunwor and on John Kerry's presidential campaign.



Comment: Eric Brewer said his son got the job on his own. Russo said, "His dad never called me." The elder Brewer briefly worked for Russo several years ago.



Holly Hegedus
Office assistant
Hired: 2003

Salary: \$26,982
Highest degree reported: High school diploma

Most recent previous job: Not on application
Connection: Listed County Commissioner Jimmy Dimora as reference.



Michael Dimora
Office assistant
Hired: 2005
Salary: \$27,722

Highest degree reported: High school diploma
Most recent previous job: Landscaper, city of Bedford
Connection: Cousin of Commissioner Dimora.



Marion Rivera
Office assistant
Hired: 2004
Salary: \$28,545
Highest degree reported: High school diploma.

Most recent previous job: In recorder's office; before that furniture store customer service representative
Connection: One-time live-in girlfriend of former Recorder O'Malley.



Janice Marino
Office assistant
Hired: 2001
Salary: \$30,403
Highest degree reported: High school diploma
Most recent previous job: Hospital secretary
Connection: Once was County Sheriff Gerald McFaul's daughter-in-law.



Michael Cook
Office assistant
Hired: 2005
Salary: \$31,827
Highest degree reported: Bachelor of arts, political science

Most recent previous job: Communication director for Democrat Capri Cafaro's unsuccessful 2004 run for Congress; before that media relations, American Red Cross
Connection: Has done political work for a number of other Democrats, including Chris Redfern, the state party chairman, and Parma Mayor Dean DePiero; ran unsuccessfully for state representative in 2004; listed Prosecutor William Mason as reference.

Comment: Russo said Cook was not hired because of his political background.



Colleen McFaul Vincelli
Office assistant
Hired: 2004
Salary: \$32,232

Highest degree reported: High school diploma

Most recent previous job: Payroll, purchasing manager
Connection: Daughter of Sheriff McFaul.



Jane Ellen George
Senior office assistant
Hired: 2005
Salary: \$32,887

Highest degree reported: High school diploma

Most recent previous job: Fitness club manager
Connection: Wife of former Lakewood Mayor Tom George.



Christine Solomon
Senior office assistant
Hired: 2005
Salary: \$33,436

Highest degree reported: High school diploma
Most recent previous job: Home loan application processor
Connection: Listed Prosecutor Mason as friend or relative.



Phillip Garofoli
Office assistant
Hired: 2006
Salary: \$35,810
Highest degree reported: Nothing listed
Most recent previous job: Sewer maintenance worker, Cuyahoga County
Connection: Son of late Democratic leader Anthony Garofoli; former brother-in-law of Russo's personnel director Joel Sacco.
Comment: "The name is political, but the relationship isn't," Russo said.



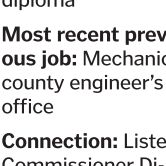
Carolyn Jurkiewicz
Office assistant
Hired: 2003
Salary: \$36,425
Highest degree reported: High school diploma

Most recent previous job: With Cuyahoga County Central Services
Connection: Listed County Commissioner Peter Lawson Jones as a reference.



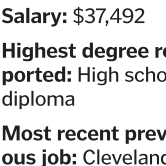
Paul J. Palmeri Jr.
Senior office assistant
Hired: 1999
Retired: 2008
Salary: \$36,976
Highest degree reported: High school diploma

Most recent previous job: Mechanic, county engineer's office
Connection: Listed Commissioner Dimora as reference.



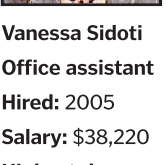
Cheryl Hill
Office assistant
Hired: 2003
Salary: \$37,492
Highest degree reported: High school diploma

Most recent previous job: Cleveland Police Department
Connection: Listed Commissioner Jones as reference.



Vanessa Sidoti
Office assistant
Hired: 2005
Salary: \$38,220

Highest degree reported: Bachelor's degree, psychology, English
Most recent previous job: Summer intern stints, auditor's office
Connection: Niece of auditor employee Sandy Klimkowski.



Michael Gabor
Senior office assistant
Hired: 2005
Salary: \$42,430
Highest degree reported: High school diploma

Most recent previous job: Store manager
Connection: Commissioner Dimora.
Comment: "I have known Jimmy Dimora for 20 years," Gabor said.



Jo Ann Stevens
Senior office assistant
Hired: 2003
Salary: \$38,670
Highest degree reported: Nothing listed
Most recent previous job: Office manager for a health and human services tax issue
Connection: Worked on Commissioner Jones' campaign; East Side office manager for then Cleveland Mayor Jane Campbell; receptionist in Prosecutor Mason's office.



Gina Marie Salvatore
Office assistant
Hired: 2000
Salary: \$39,895
Highest degree reported: High school diploma

Most recent previous job: Librarian for data storage facility
Connection: Daughter of Rick Salvatore, a Brook Park City Council member.



Ahmad Hammo
Office assistant
Hired: 2001
Salary: \$41,518
Highest degree reported: Master's degree, international studies

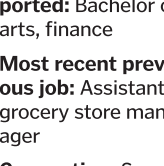
Most recent previous job: Not available
Connection: Reference was Sam Qasem, prominent businessman and Arab community leader.

Comment: Russo calls Qasem a political ally.



Haddi Qasem
Senior office assistant
Hired: 2000
Salary: \$42,148
Highest degree reported: Bachelor of arts, finance

Most recent previous job: Assistant grocery store manager
Connection: Son of Sam Qasem.



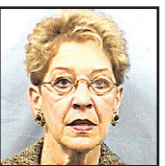
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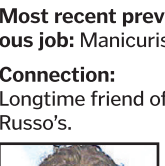
Most recent previous job: Equipment operator, Ohio Department of Transportation
Connection: Former mother-in-law is one-time Mayfield Heights Mayor Margaret Egensperger.



Kathleen Sweeney
Inspector/weights and measures
Hired: 1997
Salary: \$43,000
Highest degree reported: Bachelor of arts, urban studies
Most recent previous job: Department store counter manager
Connection: Hired several weeks after her brother, now Cleveland City Council President Martin J. Sweeney, was picked to fill a City Council opening.

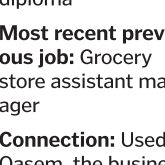


Sandra Capone
Senior office assistant
Hired: 2002
Salary: \$44,364
Highest degree reported: None
Most recent previous job: Manicurist
Connection: Longtime friend of Russo's.



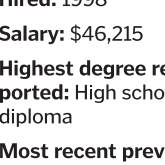
Hanane Hmada
Office assistant
Hired: 2002
Salary: \$44,594
Highest degree reported: High school diploma

Most recent previous job: Grocery store assistant manager
Connection: Used Qasem, the business leader, as a reference.



Nayra Perez Feliciano
Office assistant
Hired: 1998
Salary: \$46,215
Highest degree reported: High school diploma

Most recent previous job: Dental assistant
Connection: At time of her hiring, Perez was divorced from then-Cleveland Councilman Nelson Clinton, but living with him. They remarried, but divorced again.



John Hursh
Office assistant
Hired: 1997
Salary: \$50,318

Highest degree reported: High school diploma

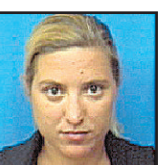
Most recent previous job: Disc jockey
Connection: Long-time friend of Russo.



Bryan Dunn
Budget analyst
Hired: 1997
Salary: \$47,532

Highest degree reported: High school diploma

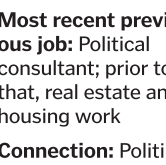
Most recent previous job: Former mother-in-law is one-time Mayfield Heights Mayor Margaret Egensperger.



Lisa Rogers
Inspector/weights and measures
Hired: 1999
Salary: \$48,076
Highest degree reported: High school diploma
Most recent previous job: Mortgage loan officer
Connection: Daughter of employee Sandy Klimkowski.



Richard Kansa
Administrative officer
Hired: 2006
Salary: \$49,429
Highest degree reported: Master of education, counseling and psychology
Most recent previous job: Political consultant; prior to that, real estate and housing work
Connection: Political consultant to U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown.



Monica Hagan
Principal office assistant
Hired: 2007
Salary: \$49,999
Highest degree reported: Bachelor of arts, speech and hearing
Most recent previous job: Educational interpreter, Lakewood schools

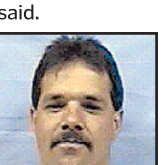
Connection: Sister of Commissioner Tim Hagan.
Comment: Russo said he did not feel pressure to hire a Hagan, even though the commissioners have authority over budgets. "Nobody pressures me," Russo said.



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Office assistant
Hired: 1997
Salary: \$50,318

Highest degree reported: High school diploma

Most recent previous job: Disc jockey
Connection: Long-time friend of Russo.



Gregory Beggiani
Residential appraiser
Hired: 1997
Salary: \$60,125

Highest degree reported: Associate's degree, real estate and science

Most recent previous job: County Domestic Relations Court
Connection: Listed then Cleveland Heights Councilman, later mayor, Edward Kelley as reference.



Monica Barber
Office assistant
Hired: 1977
Salary: \$55,383

Highest degree reported: High school diploma

Most recent previous job: Hired by then Auditor Vince Campanella.



Robert Lavdis
Appraiser assistant
Hired: 1997
Salary: \$60,761
Highest degree reported: High school diploma



Patrick O'Toole
Senior office assistant
Hired: 1998
Salary: \$55,831
Highest degree reported: Bachelor of arts, communications
Most recent previous job: County commissioners' development department
Connection: Listed as references auditor employees Monica Barber, Russo's cousin, and William Bruce Westfall.
Comment: O'Toole said he met Barber and Westfall when they worked for former Auditor Campanella and remained friends.



Victor Anselmo
Administrative officer
Hired: 2006
Salary: \$57,200, part time
Highest degree reported: Law degree

Most recent previous job: Armstrong Mitchell Damiani & Zaccagnini law firm
Connection: Russo used the law firm extensively for office business.

Comment: Russo said friendship led to the hiring. "I've known Vic for years," he said.



Nora Deane
Senior office assistant
Hired: 2001
Salary: \$59,096
Highest degree reported: High school diploma

Most recent previous job: Supervisor, recorder's office
Connection: Wife of now retired Laborers Local 310 business manager Jimmy Deane.

Comment: Russo said job not given in return for a union endorsement. "Everybody endorses me," he said.



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Highest degree reported: High school diploma

Most recent previous job: Disc jockey
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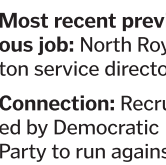
Most recent previous job: Supervisor for Russo in recorder's office
Connection: Son of the late former Cleveland Council member Robert Lavdis.



Christopher Florio
Principal office assistant
Hired: 2000
Salary: \$60,936

Highest degree reported: High school diploma

Most recent previous job: North Royalton service director
Connection: Recruited by Democratic Party to run against North Royalton Mayor Cathy Luks in 2003. It was Luks who did not reappoint him as service director.



Virginia Ann Sabetta
Senior office assistant
Hired: 1997
Salary: \$63,548

Highest degree reported: Bachelor of science, elementary education

Most recent previous job: Sales manager
Connection: Long-time friend of Russo; husband, John, helped Russo and a business partner, Ronald Romanini, file incorporation papers for their business, Accents: Home Gallery, in January 1997.



Brian M. O'Malley
Senior office assistant
Hired: 1999
Salary: \$74,217

Highest degree reported: High school diploma

Most recent previous job: Examiner for private title company
Connection: Listed now-retired Appellate Judge James D. Sweeney as reference; cousin of Joe O'Malley, long-time top aide to Russo.



Joanne White
Executive secretary
Hired: 1997
Salary: \$65,034

Highest degree reported: High school diploma

Most recent previous job: Personal secretary to Russo in recorder's office
Connection: Russo's campaign finance chairwoman.

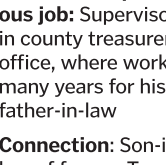
Comment: White said the campaign work is voluntary, and she does it on her own time.



Joseph Wallison
Principal office assistant
Hired: 1999
Salary: \$66,550

Highest degree reported: Bachelor of arts, political science

Most recent previous job: Supervisor in county treasurer's office, where worked many years for his father-in-law
Connection: Son-in-law of former Treasurer Frank Gaul.



Joseph Gallucci
Office assistant
Hired: 2006
Salary: \$69,885

Highest degree reported: Bachelor of science, business

Most recent previous job: Owned pizza shop

Connection: Ran against Russo for auditor in 2006.

Comment: Gallucci called to congratulate Russo after the election and mentioned he had 20 years experience in hotels and motels and wondered if he could be of service.

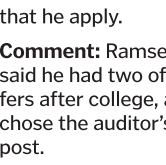


Destin Ramsey
Chief operating officer
Hired: 2002
Salary: \$74,599

Highest degree reported: Bachelor of arts, communications

Most recent previous job: Temporary jobs
Connection: College friend of Vincent Russo, the auditor's son, who Ramsey said recommended that he apply.

Comment: Ramsey said he had two offers after college, and chose the auditor's post.

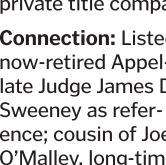


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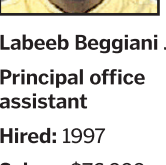
Comment: Brian O'Malley said his connections had nothing to do with getting the job. He said he approached Russo on his own.



Labeeb Beggiani Jr.
Principal office assistant
Hired: 1997
Salary: \$76,999

Highest degree reported: Bachelor of arts, business and sports management

Most recent previous job: Russo's deputy in recorder's office; had been a personal fitness trainer
Connection: Brother is auditor employee Gregory Beggiani. Russo said the brothers are long-time family friends.



Samir Mohammad
Deputy auditor
Hired: 2004
Salary: \$135,264

Highest degree reported: Master's of public administration

Most recent previous job: Chief deputy to then Recorder O'Malley
Connection: Former Recorder O'Malley.

The Plain Dealer attempted to contact each person pictured here for comment. Auditor Frank Russo requested that his workers not be contacted during business hours. Employees not reached were sent a letter saying a photo and job history might be used with this story. Education levels listed were taken from job applications and do not reflect any subsequent degrees earned.

Spreading his influence

Political influence is acquired in many ways. Elected officeholders can accumulate influence through employees active in political party ward clubs and precinct committees as well as those that hold elected office on their own. Cuyahoga County Auditor Frank Russo's large employee base gives him a reach that stretches into every compass point of the county. Not every Russo employee listed here was involved in politics before being hired. Others, with political impact, were on the staff when Russo, a Democrat, took office in early 1997.

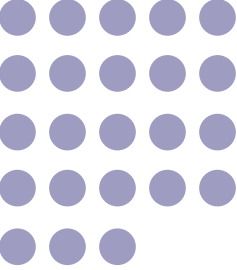
Connections to the Russo political machine

- Democratic ward leader or ward club president
- Democratic precinct committe member
- Current or former city council member
- Township trustee
- Employees with influence inherited by Russo

DEMOCRATIC WARD LEADERS OR WARD CLUB PRESIDENTS (6)



DEMOCRATIC PRECINCT COMMITTEE MEMBERS (23)



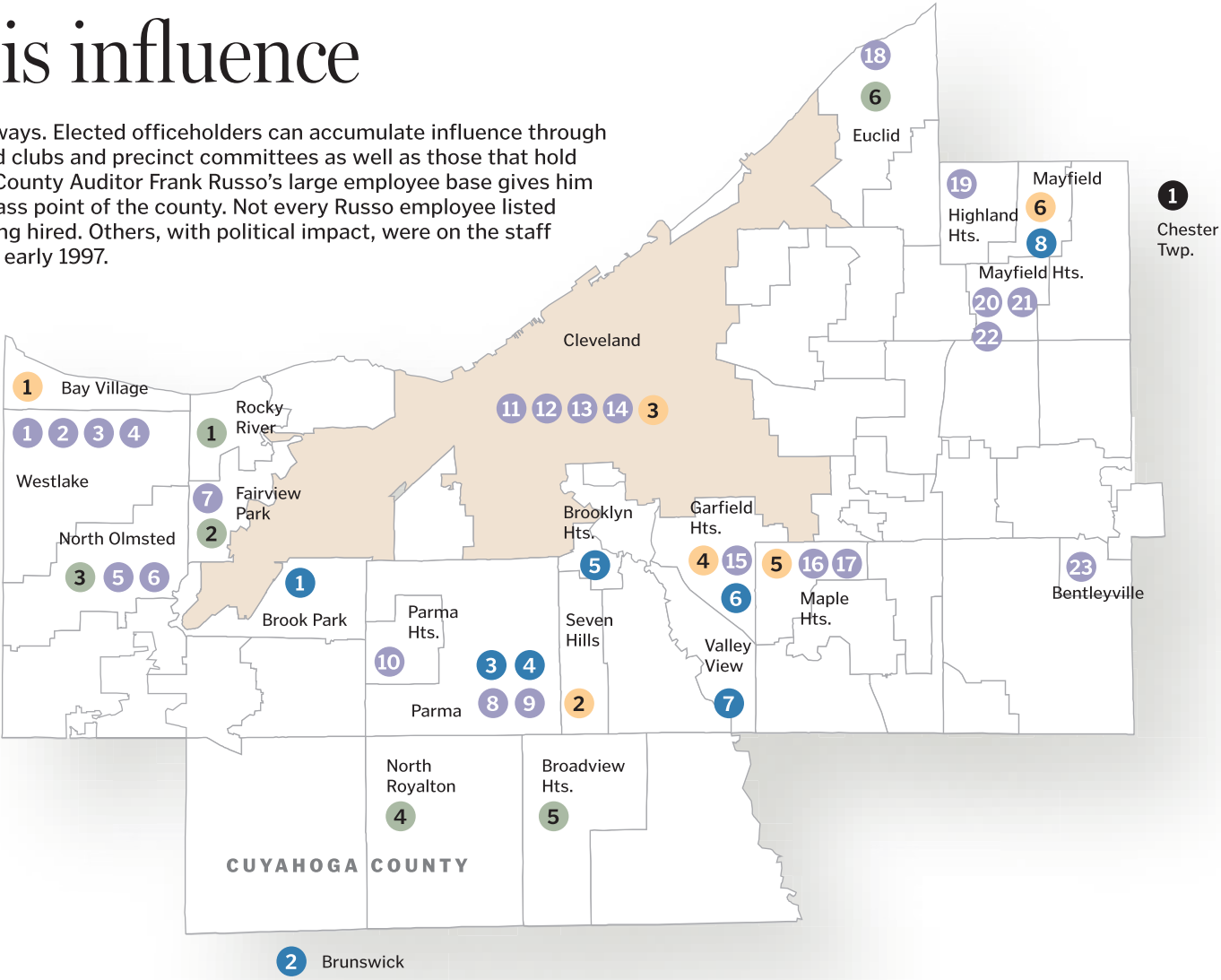
FORMER OR CURRENT CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS (8)



TOWNSHIP TRUSTEE (1)



EMPLOYEES WITH INFLUENCE INHERITED BY RUSSO (6)



Democratic ward leaders or ward club presidents						
	Employee	Home	Position	Salary	Hired	Year took political post
1	Noreen O'Malley	Bay Village	Office assistant	\$17,086 P/T	1998*	Undetermined
2	Matt Trafis	Seven Hills	Office assistant	\$33,546	2005	2006
3	Rosemary Vinci	Cleveland	Office assistant	\$48,064	2006	Undetermined
4	Anthony Cosentino	Garfield Hts.	Office assistant	\$7,498 P/T	2006	1996
5	Paula Price	Maple Hts.	Office assistant	\$29,993	2006	2004
6	Joanne Laurie-O'Brien	Mayfield	Director/external affairs	\$78,257	1997	1996

Democratic precinct committee members						
1	Joe O'Malley	Westlake	Administrative officer	<\$100,000	1997**	2002
2	Sheryl Scheckel	Westlake	Senior office assistant	\$54,841	2000	2006
3	Dan Weaver	Westlake	Director, information service center	\$128,663	1998	2004
4	Dana Zenkewicz	Westlake	Office assistant	\$23,579 P/T	1997	2002
5	Colleen Brown	North Olmsted	Accountant	\$48,048	2002	2006
6	Robin Siebert	North Olmsted	Senior office assistant	\$48,024	1997	2006
7	John Cooney	Fairview Park	Residential appraiser	\$44,649	1997	2002
8	Lisa DePiero	Parma	Senior office assistant	\$64,966	2000	2002
9	Michael D. Louis	Parma	Appraiser assistant	\$44,483	2004	1998–2002
10	Karen Jablonski	Parma Hts.	Senior office assistant	\$41,540	2002	2006
11	Colleen B. Corrigan	Cleveland	Office assistant	\$38,491	1997	2006
12	Mildred DuMas	Cleveland	Office assistant	\$31,935	1998	1990
13	Joseph Micciulla	Cleveland	Senior office assistant	\$56,911	2000	2002
14	Mary Mihaly	Cleveland	Senior office assistant	\$65,348	1999	2006
15	Frank Geraci	Garfield Hts.	Office assistant	\$9,957 P/T	2005	1986
16	Michelle Holmes	Maple Hts.	Senior office assistant	\$45,969	1998	1998
17	Sandy Klimkowski	Maple Hts.	Appraisal department specialist	\$102,966	1997	1974
18	Jackie Gallagher	Euclid	Inspector, weights and measures	\$47,286	1998	2006
19	Andrea Newcomer	Highland Hts.	Senior office assistant	\$38,165	2002	2006
20	Anthony DeBaltzo	Mayfield Hts.	Office assistant	\$31,836	2004	2006
21	Grace Lazzara	Mayfield Hts.	Office assistant	\$36,972	1999	2006
22	James Stella	Mayfield Hts.	Office assistant	\$42,151	1997	2002
23	Joel Sacco	Bentleyville	Personnel director	\$104,878	2002	Undetermined

Current and former city council members						
1	Danny Colonna	Brook Park	Office assistant	\$49,899	2007	2002
2	Anthony Capretta	Brunswick	Inspector, weights and measures	\$40,456	1998	2004
3	Sam Bonanno	Parma	Office assistant	\$46,384	1997	1996–2001
4	Brian Day	Parma	Office assistant	\$57,999	2007	2003
5	Michael D'Amico	Brooklyn Hts.	Office assistant	\$34,312	2003	1981
6	Michael Abella	Garfield Hts.	Senior office assistant	\$58,914	1999	1991–95
7	Jeff Wyatt	Valley View	Senior office assistant	\$59,528	1997	2000
8	William Buckholtz	Mayfield	Programmer	\$70,001	2000	1993

Township trustee						
1	Judith Caputo	Chester Township	Tax examiner	\$73,774	1997	2005

Employees inherited by Russo with influence						
1	Kathleen Goepfert	Rocky River	Inventory/procurement officer	\$40,204	1984	Rocky River Board of Education member
2	William Bruce Westfall	Fairview Park	Director/inspections	\$79,952	1980	Fairview Park City Council member
3	Cheryl Arslanian	North Olmsted	Fiscal controller	\$69,427	1982	Democratic precinct committee member
4	Victorio Monteleone	North Royalton	Office assistant	\$39,631	1990	Former North Royalton City Council member
5	Ronald Popek	Broadview Hts.	Residential appraiser	\$43,176	1983	Former Democratic precinct committee member
6	Nina Cofield	Euclid	Account technician	\$45,019	1984	Democratic precinct committee member

PAYROLLS

FROM A1

A political machine, financed by you

Five held elective office, and at least two others were former city council members. Twenty-nine workers were party precinct or ward stalwarts.

Russo inherited connected workers when he took office in 1997 after three terms as recorder. Others followed him from the recorder's office or gained their political pull after they were hired.

But after becoming auditor 11 years ago, Russo hired at least 38 people who either had connections or became politically active after getting their jobs. That's on top of 49 other hires who were friends of Russo or recommended by associates of Russo.

All told, Russo has about twice as many employees per county resident as either of two comparable counties.

One advocate for government reform calls this form of patronage — providing jobs for friends and political allies — an unnecessary cost. “Why are the average taxpayers paying for a patronage system that supports a particular officeholder?” asked Kathleen Barber, who chaired a failed movement to reform the Cuyahoga County structure in the mid-1990s.

Republicans suggest that the auditor's staff amounts to a publicly financed campaign organization that helps Democrats maintain their decades-long lock on most countywide offices.

But Cheryl Arslanian, a 26-year auditor's office employee, said in an email that Russo hasn't taken advantage of her position as a Democratic precinct committee member since she was elected in 2006.

“I have never spoken to the county auditor about my position as a precinct committee person, nor has he ever communicated with me,” she said.

Jerry Austin, a national political consultant who often works for Democrats, describes Russo's ability to mix public service with politics as legendary.

“When you come to work for Frank Russo, whatever qualifications you have for the job, you're also going to be doing political campaign work,” Austin said.

'Basically a network of all my friends'

Russo, who at 58 has been in politics for 30 years, makes no apologies for his hiring practices. He says his workers are qualified and his office provides some of the best public service in county government.

He also acknowledges that employees are a part of his political organization, one that he describes as “basically a network of all my friends I have accumulated for the last 30 years, from the neighborhood, schoolmates, family and my workers.”

His staff has grown since 1997 from the equivalent of 265 full-time workers to the equivalent of 283 full-time workers as of December 2007, despite a 2001 countywide buyout that eliminated 46 positions in the auditor's office, and a current hiring freeze.

Russo said his staff has since dropped to 270.

Even with 270 workers, that amounts to far more employees per Cuyahoga resident than in two other large Ohio counties. The Cuyahoga ratio is one employee for every 4,867 residents. Hamilton County's auditor, who employs 99, has a ratio of one worker for every 8,309 residents. In Franklin County, where the auditor reports 114 employees, the staff ratio is one employee per 9,611 residents.

Russo's staff contends that a comparison with Franklin County Auditor Joe Testa is unfair because Testa has contractors do much of the appraisal work. Testa last week said the comparison is fair because Russo also has contractors do appraisals.

The staffers delivering the most clout to Russo are those who serve as precinct and ward leaders, because they often double as members of the party's powerful central and executive committees.

Their positions allow them to participate in the choice of party leadership, to vote on appointments to vacated elective offices and to decide who gets party endorsements.

SEE PAYROLLS | **A18**

SOURCES: Interviews with Frank Russo and members of his staff; Cuyahoga County personnel records